

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

Please CANCEL claim 2 without prejudice or disclaimer.

Please AMEND claims 1, 3-11, and ADD new claims 12-19 in accordance with the following:

1. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information retrieval/distribution system, comprising:

an information retrieval request unit ~~for~~ requesting the retrieval of several kinds of information ~~which~~ that are scattered on a network; and

a plurality of database management units ~~for~~ managing databases in which said several kinds of information are stored,

wherein each of said plurality of database management units has management information about the databases ~~which~~ that are managed by each database management unit, and has management information about the databases ~~which~~ that are managed by other database management units ~~which~~ that can be connected to said each database management unit through said network~~[[;]]~~, and

wherein when a retrieval criterion is input to said information retrieval request unit, one of said plurality of database management units, based on said management information in one database management unit, retrieves the information in the databases managed by said one database management unit, and requests any other database management unit managing the database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion is stored, to retrieve the information in the databases managed by said other database management unit, thereby distributing the information corresponding to said retrieval criterion to ~~the~~ an information retrieval request source,

wherein said one database management unit manages a plurality of databases and registers kinds of said plurality of databases as management information and, when the information retrieval is requested by said information retrieval request source, said one database management unit retrieves said plurality of databases to collect the required information, and then converts the data format of the collected information into a unified format and distributes

the collected information to said information retrieval request source.

2. (CANCELLED)

3. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit ~~has the function of requesting~~ requests said other database management unit to retrieve the information in the databases managed by said other database management unit followed by receiving the result of the retrieval of said information from said other database management unit to distribute said result to said information retrieval request source.

4. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one ~~manager has at least one of the functions of including~~ one database management unit includes the list of the management information possessed by said other database management unit in the management information of said one database management unit~~[[:]], comparing the management information of the database management unit which that~~ has been newly requested to retrieve the required information by said one database management unit with the management information of said one database management unit to obtain the difference between said both management information~~[[:]],~~ and updating the management information of said one database management unit, based on said difference~~[[:]] or~~ and the function of communicating communicates with said other database management unit periodically and exchanging the management information with said other database management unit ~~each other~~ to update the management information of said one database management unit.

5. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit ~~has the functions of: making~~ makes category information ~~which that~~ defines the categories of the databases managed by said one database management unit~~[[:]],~~ and ~~designating~~ designates a database management unit managing the database in the same category to exchange the information with said database management unit, based on said category information.

6. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit ~~has the functions of: designating~~ designates retrieving items of the information in the databases managed by said one database

management unit through ~~the~~ a retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit~~[[:]]~~, and ~~requesting~~ requests said other database management unit to retrieve the information in the databases managed by said other database management unit.

7. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit ~~has the function of requesting~~ requests automatically said other database management unit managing the database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion is stored, to retrieve said information, in the case in which said one database management unit does not designate any retrieving item through ~~the~~ a retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit.

8. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit ~~has the functions of: designating~~ designates a category through ~~the~~ a retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit~~[[:]]~~, and ~~connecting~~ connects said one database management unit automatically to said other database management unit managing the database in said category to select said database in said category.

9. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit ~~has the functions of: registering~~ registers the retrieval information of said information retrieval request source~~[[:]]~~, ~~executing~~ executes the same retrieval periodically, based on said retrieval information~~[[:]]~~, and ~~sends~~ sending the result of the retrieval to said information retrieval request source.

10. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A computer-readable storage medium storing a program for controlling a computer to retrieve/distribute, by,  
~~a means which retrieves the~~ retrieving information in the databases managed by one of a plurality of database management units, based on ~~the~~ management information in one database management unit, when a retrieval criterion is input to an information retrieval request unit ~~for~~ requesting the retrieval of several kinds of information which are scattered on a network; and  
~~a means which requests~~ requesting any other database management unit ~~which that~~ that is able to be connected to said one database management unit through said network, to retrieve the information in ~~the~~ a database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion is stored and ~~which that~~ that is managed by said other database management unit, based on the

management information about the databases managed by said other database management unit,

registering kinds of said plurality of databases as management information by the one of the plurality of database management units;

retrieving said plurality of databases to collect the required information when the information retrieval is requested by an information retrieval request source by the one of the plurality of database management units;

converting the data format of the collected information into a unified format by the one of the plurality of database management units; and

distributing the collected information to said information retrieval request source by the one of the plurality of database management units.

11. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A ~~program~~ method for information retrieval/distribution ~~allowing a computer, in order to retrieve information and distribute said information to the~~ an information retrieval request source, ~~to operate as~~ comprising:

~~a means which retrieves~~ retrieving the information in a plurality of the databases managed by one of a plurality of database management units, based on the management information in one database management unit, when a retrieval criterion is input to an information retrieval request unit ~~for requesting the retrieval of several kinds of information which~~ that are scattered on a network; and

~~a means which requests~~ requesting any other database management unit ~~which that~~ can be connected to said one database management unit, through said network, to retrieve the information in the database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion is stored and which is managed by said other database management unit, based on the management information about the databases which are managed by said other database management unit,

registering kinds of said plurality of databases as management information by the one of a plurality of database management units;

retrieving said plurality of databases to collect the required information when the information retrieval is requested by said information retrieval request source by the one of a plurality of database management units;

converting the data format of the collected information into a unified format by the one of a plurality of database management units; and

distributing the collected information to said information retrieval request source by the

one of a plurality of database management units.

12. (NEW) The method according to claim 11, further comprising requesting said other database management unit to retrieve the information in the databases managed by said other database management unit followed by receiving the result of the retrieval of said information from said other database management unit to distribute said result to said information retrieval request source by said one database management unit.

13. (NEW) The method according to claim 11, further comprising:  
including the list of the management information possessed by said other database management unit in the management information of said one database management unit by the one manager;

comparing the management information of the database management unit that has been newly requested to retrieve the required information by said one database management unit with the management information of said one database management unit to obtain the difference between said both management information by the one manager;

updating the management information of said one database management unit, based on said difference or communicates with said other database management unit periodically, by the one manager; and

exchanging the management information with said other database management unit each other to update the management information of said one database management unit by the one manager.

14. (NEW) The method according to claim 11, further comprising:  
making category information that defines the categories of the databases managed by said one database management unit by the one database management unit; and

designating a database management unit managing the database in the same category to exchange the information with said database management unit, based on said category information by the one database management unit.

15. (NEW) The method according to claim 11, further comprising:  
designating retrieving items of the information in the databases managed by said one database management unit through the retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit said one database management unit said one database management unit;

requesting said other database management unit to retrieve the information in the databases managed by said other database management unit by said one database management unit.

16. (NEW) The method according to claim 11, further comprising requesting automatically said other database management unit managing the database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion is stored, to retrieve said information, in the case in which said one database management unit does not designate any retrieving item through the retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit by said one database management unit.

17. (NEW) The method according to claim 11, further comprising:  
designating a category through the retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit by said one database management unit; and  
connecting said one database management unit automatically to said other database management unit managing the database in said category to select said database in said category by said one database management unit.

18. (NEW) The method according to claim 11, further comprising:  
registering the retrieval information of said information retrieval request source by said one database management unit;  
executing the same retrieval periodically, based on said retrieval information by said one database management unit; and  
sending the result of the retrieval to said information retrieval request source by said one database management unit.

19. (NEW) An information retrieval/distribution system, comprising:  
a plurality of databases; and  
a plurality of database management units managing databases in which said several kinds of information are stored,  
wherein one database management unit of a plurality of database management units managing a plurality of databases and registering kinds of said plurality of databases as management information and, when information retrieval is requested by an information retrieval

request source, said one database management unit retrieves said plurality of databases to collect the required information, and then converts the data format of the collected information into a unified format and distributes the collected information to said information retrieval request source.